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ISS Personnel Management Program  
1974 - 1977

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### OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to provide a record of developments in the personnel management field in Information Services Staff (formerly Information Services Group) during the period from January, 1974 through July, 1977. An effort is made to relate these developments to Agency and Directorate personnel policies during the same time frame.

### BACKGROUND

Prior to 1974, Information Services Group (ISG) conformed to the existing personnel policies and programs of the Directorate. There was some feeling that the uniqueness of the functions performed in ISG (as compared with DDO divisions and staffs) created a situation in which ISG was perceived to be "second-class." In January of that year a new chief was appointed who had previous experience in the Group and was aware of the inherent problems. He also brought to the job a philosophy of management unlike that which had been the practice in ISG (or in the rest of the Directorate) in the past. This philosophy was characterized by a high degree of employee participation and management-employee communication. To make this philosophy work, and to incorporate several objectives for improving the quality of the service provided by ISG, three basic goals were set:

1. To bring modern personnel management techniques to bear on ISG personnel.
2. To integrate into a cohesive organization a high quality of information services expertise and level of performance.
3. To build a cadre of officers who saw the information services support role as professionally and personally rewarding, and thus would be capable of moving into positions of leadership.

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### LAUNCHING THE PROGRAM

Although Chief, ISG could identify many of the management problem areas from his previous experience, he wanted to ensure that he was aware of all areas so that he could identify priorities, weigh equities, and attack the roots, not the symptoms of the problems. Having some general background knowledge of the use of attitude surveys in private industry and having had discussions with persons from Texas Instruments Corporation who had experience with the attitude survey process, C/ISG got approval from upper management to conduct an attitude survey in ISG in May, 1974. After distribution of the questionnaire, C/ISG, accompanied by two psychologists from Psychological Services Staff, Office of Medical Services, paid a visit to Texas Instruments Corporation to learn more about the analysis of the responses and the employee committee process.

During the planning and implementation phase of Attitude Survey I (a second survey was conducted in 1975), other actions were being taken to alleviate the more obvious problems. These actions included the following:

1. Upgrading of positions in the Main Index and recommendations for other upgradings to allow greater upward mobility.
2. Beginning a task analysis of all jobs in ISG with a goal of creating a career planning mechanism. (A similar effort had been made earlier in Systems Group, including a proposal for the creation of a Career Management Officer position.)
3. Preliminary discussions on upgrading the internal training effort to improve qualifications and morale of ISG personnel.
4. Preliminary discussions on improving personnel management planning by redefining and expanding the role of the ISG Personnel Management Committee.
5. Preliminary discussions on improving communications including the publishing of a newsletter, the posting of a bulletin board, and the circulation of vacancy notices.

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### ATTITUDE SURVEY I

The ISG Attitude Survey "I", distributed in May, 1974, was constructed and administered in the same manner as other attitude surveys in this Agency. A complete description of the process may be found in Reference 11.

The uniqueness of ISG's surveys was not in the manner in which they were conducted, but in the follow-up. Consistent with his belief in employee participation in the management process, Chief, ISG, approved the creation of five employee committees to further study several problem areas identified by the survey. These areas were either significant problems, as measured by the survey, or the results were obscure and required clarification. The following committees were established, staffed by employees elected by the offices which they represented:

1. Employee Steering Committee
2. EEO Committee
3. Communications Committee
4. Job Satisfaction and Job Content Committee
5. Performance Evaluation Committee

Each committee was charged with reviewing the portions of the attitude survey relevant to its topic and with making recommendations to management. A non-ISG mid-level officer was assigned to assist each committee in an advisory capacity. Management, in turn, was committed to responding to each recommendation, replying with a positive answer, a negative answer with explanation, or a "maybe" with explanation (usually in cases where non-ISG approval or support would be required if the recommendation was implemented).

The committee reports and management's replies, as well as papers addressing the employee committee procedures, are listed as references. The following points on the procedural aspects of this approach are worth noting:

1. Time required: an estimated minimum of 14 weeks was planned for the survey itself (from construction of the questionnaire to the final report from OMS/PSS). No such estimate or hard figures are available for the immediate follow-up of employee committee and management steering committee work. However, the

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time required was substantial, involving many hours of duty-time meetings between November, 1974 and February, 1975. (Employee committees were asked to meet no more than 4 hours per week; 42 employees were involved.)

2. Initial guidance: the advisors to the employee committees had a significant role to play in the beginning due to the participants' lack of knowledge of ISG and their skepticism of the commitment of management. This role of providing direction and reassurance decreased as group cohesiveness increased, but the advisors felt their presence was necessary throughout the process.
3. Involvement in the process: the employee committees were made up of non-supervisory personnel (one exception); the management steering committee consisted of C/ISG, three deputies, and assorted advisors. The lack of involvement of mid-level management personnel during this early stage had some negative effects on later progress of the program. (The first significant effort to involve mid-level managers in the program was a series of supervisors' seminars, begun in February, 1975, conducted by the ISG personnel office.)

In addition to the five employee committees, a joint management-employee committee was established to formulate a practical and equitable system of advertising vacant positions. This resulted in ISG's initial policy of advertising all vacant positions, grades GS-06 through GS-13, with the final selection of the best qualified candidate to fill each position made by the ISG/PMC. A further commitment was made to explain to each unsuccessful candidate the reasons why he was not selected. (This applied only to ISG positions; non-ISG vacancies are selectively advertised and reasons for non-selection of an ISG applicant often are unclear.) The ISG policy was revised in 1976 to permit branches with vacant positions to recommend to the PMC a branch candidate without a vacancy notice. The PMC

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could accept the candidate; select another candidate within two grades of the job for career development purposes; or decide to circulate a vacancy notice.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the employee committees are detailed in the employee committee reports and management responses, listed as references.

The actions listed below were taken as a result of the employee committee recommendations and of additional perceptions on the part of management. These changes took place during the period July, 1974 through September, 1975 (the second attitude survey was distributed to employees in October, 1975.)

1. Guidance for ISG supervisors was published emphasizing the importance of honesty in performance appraisal and its role in career development.
2. Training for supervisors received new emphasis, resulting in various special training programs conducted jointly by ISG/Training and OTR:
3. The ISG Newsletter was expanded to provide more and better management-employee communication.
4. All-employee bulletins were published on the following subjects:
  - a. Promotion policies and procedures.
  - b. Role of the ISG Training Staff.
  - c. Policy for filling vacant positions.
5. Awards and promotions received more formal recognition in ceremonies attended by C/ISG and all group chiefs.
6. Flexitime was implemented on a six-month trial basis. (The experiment was successful and Flexitime continued.)

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7. Regular staff meetings at all levels were encouraged as a means of improving communication.
8. A new policy provided for a twenty-four hour review period of fitness reports in draft before an employee could be required to sign the final report.
9. Two new kinds of assignments were created for career development purposes:
  - a. Rotational - when an employee remained slotted in his own office but worked in another office for a specific period of time to gain experience.
  - b. Developmental - when an employee was replaced in his old office, placed in the development complement, and worked in a new office for a trial period of approximately 6 months. If the trial period was successful, the employee was assigned (slotted) to the new office.
10. ISG secretaries began meeting regularly under the chairmanship of the secretary to Chief, ISG. This group became increasingly more active and effective, becoming involved in special projects and inviting guest speakers to address the group. The formation of this group coincided roughly with the formation of a DDO Secretarial/Clerical Advisory Group.

### CAREER DEVELOPMENT

A continuing theme throughout the attitude survey and the reports of all five employee committees was the need for more and better information and opportunities for career planning and development. This theme was not unique to ISG. In 1974, the Agency began using two annual plans to provide more consistent and effective use and development of personnel. In addition to the Annual Personnel Plan and the Personnel Development Plan, in April, 1974 the Office

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of Training produced a study which resulted in the development of training profiles for each discipline in the Agency and within disciplines, for specific grade levels. In the

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In addition to these internal Agency activities, the Civil Service Commission charged each government agency with doing a survey of employees in grade GS-07 and below to determine whether or not they were using their skills to the fullest extent possible in the jobs to which they were assigned. If an employee with under-utilized skills was identified during this exercise, the Agency was expected to arrange a reassignment.

ISG participated in all four of these exercises. The APP and PDP are submitted annually. The developmental profiles have not been reviewed since 1974 and are in need of revision. They were developed by Chief, ISG/Training against a short deadline, with the knowledge that an ISG Career Development Plan was under development and would supersede the profiles, at least within ISG. This assumption has proved to be correct, but training recommendations coming from evaluation panels are sometimes irrelevant because the panels have used the profiles

[REDACTED] These profiles are too general to be used for planning except by someone intimately familiar with the type of work the profile covers.

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The design of the ISG Career Development Plan was one of the most time-consuming activities during the period covered by this paper and the impact cannot yet be measured. Basically the process involved the following stages of development:

1. Task analysis of all job functions in ISG to identify the knowledge and performance skills and training required to perform each job. The task analysis was done by observation and interviews, not just by analyzing job descriptions.
2. Grouping like functions. This step revealed some duplication of functions and led to a reorganization in DIP (now Information Processing Group). Each grouping became a career development area.

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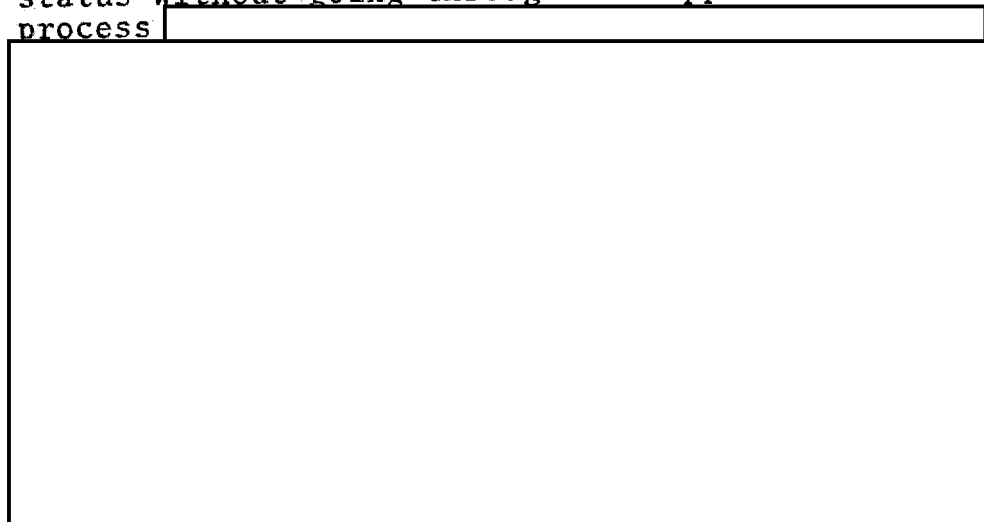
3. Determining levels of performance within each area, based on the data collected, and estimating the length of time required at each level to attain the skills needed to advance.
4. Identifying bridges between career development areas which would permit transfers, and ranking those bridges by degree of difficulty (i.e., from most-related to least-related area, signifying varying levels of effort individuals would have to put forth to make a transfer).

### CONCURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

This process covered a time period of approximately twenty months, from January, 1975 to the distribution of the completed plan in October, 1976. While the Career Development Plan was evolving, several policies and procedures were announced on the Directorate or Agency level which were related to personnel management and thus had to be considered in the development of ISG's program. Several had direct impact on ISG and were in fact initiated by ISG. These Agency and DDO developments included, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

1. ISG received approval from the Directorate in December, 1974 to begin converting employees from clerical to professional status without going through the approval process

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of a form surveying interest in career counseling interviews with CMG counselors. The objectives of the CMG program were in line with the objectives of ISG's program and included emphasis on honest communication.

3. An employee bulletin was published summarizing Agency-wide efforts to bring more uniformity to personnel management and announcing several new directions which were to be pursued. These included greater standardization of a personnel ranking system by categories; better use of involuntary separation; and the role of the APP and the PDP.
4. The DDO circulated a memo to all division and staff chiefs on the importance of training counseling for employees taking advantage of external training opportunities. The guidelines he set forth were already being applied in ISG. The only change for ISG was the addition of a CMG coordination requirement on all external training nominations.
5. PMCD began an ISG-wide survey in November, 1975. This survey was interrupted frequently by PMCD requirements and DDO reorganization. Part of the final report was delivered to Chief, ISS in August, 1977. This delay caused a great deal of frustration and played havoc with an otherwise well-organized personnel management program, particularly during promotion exercises and in planning reassignments.
6. Effective in January, 1976 ISG became the home-base component for approximately 135 employees in records-related jobs throughout the DDO. These employees had to be integrated into all phases of the ISG personnel program, including the Career Development Plan. They were welcomed to ISG, and its programs were described to them in two sessions in GA-13 in October, 1975.

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7. The DDO Affirmative Action Plan for FY 1976 contained a reference to a clerical skills improvement program. This was a reference to an ISG proposal that a facility be set up to permit employees to practice typing in preparation for the Agency typing test. This proposal was never acted upon, but ISG adapted it and implemented a program whereby employees could practice typing in the training office for 30 minutes duty time plus 30 minutes of their own time. The Director, EEO was briefed on the program in August, 1975.
8. A DDO attitude survey and an Agency-wide survey on personnel management were conducted. Specific examples of follow-up action are difficult to identify, but some ordinary and expected actions may have been attributed to survey follow-up.

While these events were taking place and having varying degrees of impact on ISG, the three initial goals established in 1974 were still influencing internal developments. During this period significant progress was made in supervisory training, the lack of which was a problem area clearly identified in the first attitude survey as a negative influence on morale. A series of Performance Evaluation Workshops was conducted to improve the quality of fitness reports and LOI's, and to emphasize the importance of supervisor-employee communication in the evaluation process. A contractor was hired to conduct two sessions of "Models for Management," an intensive learning experience based on subordinate feedback and the identification and application of a management style utilizing the best of existing management models. A seminar series based on the Herzberg "Motivation to Work" films was led by an IBM contractor. Immediately before and during the distribution of the ISS Career Development Plan, over seventy supervisors attended supervisory counseling workshops to become familiar with the plan and with counseling techniques which they would be using during its implementation.

Another action taken to improve morale was the improvement of working conditions by the installation of carpeting throughout ISG offices. This was followed some time later by the conversion of many rooms of furniture to the "office excellence" style, with painted bases and woodgrain tops.

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As part of his commitment to two-way communication and participative management, Chief, ISG held two sessions in the auditorium in May, 1975 to bring all employees up-to-date on attitude survey follow up actions and to introduce his successor, who took over in September, 1975. The new chief pledged to continue the development of the personnel management program. Early examples of his commitment included the distribution of a second attitude survey in October, the announcement of the formation of an Information Services Advisory Group (a component-level MAG group), and his support for a series of visits to each ISG office by the component personnel and training officers. These visits, commonly referred to as "show-and-tell," were informal sessions designed to open up a dialogue on training and personnel matters and included such topics as how promotion panels work, what the PMC does, what should be in a personnel file, and what kinds of counseling services are available in the Agency (career, medical, legal, etc.). Between October, 1975 and December, 1976 every office, including home-base offices, had participated in this program.

The Information Services Advisory Group (now ISSAG), an elected body, was charged with investigating topics assigned by C/ISG and with generating their own areas of study. Some of their early assignments were studies of ways to improve the ISS Newsletter; the purpose, usage, and format of the LOI; and the results of the second attitude survey. The Advisory Group obviated the need for special employee committees to analyze problem areas. Subsequent issues studied by this body included parking regulations, training, the feasibility of a sub-panel peer review system for promotion exercises, and safety and cleanliness in the work environment.

In addition to actions taken to improve morale and personnel management policies, several things were taking place to meet the goal of improving services provided by ISG to the Directorate. These included:

1. Surveys done by two contracting firms (one surveying Systems Group; the other surveying the rest of ISG) which resulted in recommendations for realignment of functions, development of new systems, and management of personnel. Both surveys generally confirmed what ISG management already knew and neither was the sole source of any major changes. The process itself, however, was the first time ISG employees contributed to such a study.

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2. An Information Systems Planning Group (ISPG) was created to study the systems and services of ISG and to make recommendations for 1980's planning. The study was widely circulated and discussed and could be considered another element contributing to a better self-image in ISG.

### THE RECENT PAST

The distribution of the ISG Career Development Plan, the publication of the ISPG study, and the reorganization of the DDO staffs all took place in October, 1976. Each had a significant impact on ISG (which became Information Services Staff - ISS) during the period from that time to the present. The ISPG study, while containing a number of recommendations for the training of personnel, was not intended to be a primary force in the personnel management program and is not discussed further in this paper.

Copies of the ISS Career Development Plan were distributed down to the section level. Supervisors were asked to hold a career development interview with each subordinate and to submit a written record of the interview by March, 1977. The record was to reflect the subordinate's current area and level on the career path plan and any known career development or training goals. It is intended that a written record of subsequent career development interviews will be added to this file. The Plan caused some initial concern on the part of employees and supervisors. It was a controversial topic of discussion in Supervisory Counseling Workshops, the Advisory Group meetings, staff meetings, and social discussions. Concerns included where the interview records would be filed; what format should be used for the record; the time required to make the Plan work; additional, and in many cases unfamiliar, counseling responsibilities for supervisors; wide-ranging differences in evaluation standards among supervisors and among employees; how management would use the information contained in the record; and whether or not this was anything more than a paper exercise.

The ISS Career Development Plan is unique in its format and scope, rather than in its intent. Other components have or are developing career path plans, but as best as can be determined, the ISS plan is the most comprehensive. In an effort to share the ideas and techniques and to gain the support of people who could provide support to ISS, the

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following offices have been briefed on the Plan since October, 1976: Office of the Director of Personnel, DDO/ Career Management Staff, Office of Training, the DDO EEO and senior training officers, the Agency Management Advisory Group, the Office of Personnel Advisory Group, the 1977 Records Management Officers' Conference, and numerous other individuals.

The reorganization of the DDO staffs had an impact on functions and on personnel. The elevation of ISG to staff level created new demands on the chief who remained as acting chief of the staff. It is difficult to measure the effect this new status had on the component and on the responsibilities of Chief, ISS. It is reasonable to assume, however, that more time could have been devoted to the continuation of the fledgling programs if the component's status had remained constant, and that there was some slip-page due to reorganization. This reorganization included the addition of the Directorate's Freedom of Information and Privacy Act group, a group for whom the ISS Career Development Plan is now being amended.

As part of the effort to sustain the momentum despite the new pressures, a Career Management Officer was named in February, 1977. His primary initial responsibility was to work on the home-base program. ISS continued to have some difficulty fully integrating the home-based group into the mainstream of ISS programs, particularly those individuals returning from the field who had to be placed. The CMO devoted nearly all of his time during the early months to planning for and counseling home-based employees. The home-based employees generally had less training than internal ISS'ers and with the exception of overseas service, they also had a more narrow range of experience in the records field. Efforts to cross-train employees between ISS and home-base positions will continue to require significant management attention for several years.

When the Career Management Officer position was created, discussions were already underway on the desirability of combining this function with the Training Staff. The inseparable training and personnel aspects of ISG's program had been successfully integrated, due more to the personalities of the incumbents, rather than to any organizational proximity. The 1976 reorganization of the DDO staffs further removed the personnel support organizationally by creating a single personnel office for all the staffs. The merger of the ISS Training Staff and Career Management Officer function which took place in June, 1977, was an

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attempt to compensate for and compliment the organizational distance of the personnel office.

A new Chief, ISS was named in April, 1977. Like his two predecessors, he considers good personnel management a cornerstone of an effective organization. Several trends and changes in Directorate personnel management, however, may make it difficult to keep the ISS program on an even keel and will require adjustments [redacted] Shortly after the appointment of the new ISS chief, Career Management Staff instituted a new promotion system for GS-07 clericals. The elements of this system which had a significant impact on ISS were the assignment of career categories to GS-07 clericals, the elimination of the traditional headroom requirement, and strict adherence to a time-in-grade requirement. These elements were significant because the system did little to recognize the fundamental differences between ISS clerical jobs and other DDO clerical jobs at the same grade level.

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During the same period, other external forces were also affecting ISS. In an effort to achieve a better balance between officers and secretaries in the Directorate, a clerical freeze was ordered. As the feeder component with entry level GS-03 jobs, ISS quickly began to fall short in some areas. In addition to the hiring freeze, overseas registry positions had been declining steadily and 1977 brought the realization that it was going to be increasingly difficult to send experienced people overseas, because singleton positions and chiefs of registry jobs were declining in grade, as well as in number.

During the summer of 1977, the impact of the [redacted] charges and the "gang of eleven" spurred an already emerging awareness of the importance of new personnel management policies for the Directorate. A series of bulletins and notices was published on subjects ranging from management-employee communications to supervision and evaluation of new employees to messages to field stations on general personnel management policies. Further study was going on at the DDO level on vacancy notices and outplacement, and Agency-wide on fitness reports. On several occasions, Chief, ISS, was able to make contributions to the development of new policies, based on the ISS experience.

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### CONCLUSIONS

The ISS program, though progressive compared to other programs in the Agency, still needs time to prove itself. The frequent changes in ISS leadership, Directorate reorganization, impending reductions in personnel, external legislation and internal controls (e.g. FLSA, PMCD surveys) have or will take their toll. So too has the uneven management support for the program both inside and outside ISS, with the most serious impact coming from within where there is still some skepticism at middle and upper levels. Nevertheless it should be recognized that 3 1/2 years is a short time in organization development terms. ISS today is light-years ahead of the ISG of 1973.

The success of ISS's organization development effort is evident in several trends. The "second-class citizen" syndrome which permeated the whole component is nearly gone. The results of the second attitude survey and the increasing numbers of outsiders seeking jobs in ISS clearly indicate this. ISS'ers are sometimes reluctant to leave, even to go to home-base jobs, because of privileges like flexitime, which are not available outside of ISS-proper.

It is also clear that ISS personnel are more versatile and better trained than ever before. The emphasis on formal training, the availability of rotational and developmental assignments, and the impact of various working groups composed of cross-sections of ISS personnel have clearly reduced the tunnel vision which used to be common.

The impact of the Career Development Plan on employees and its utility in the human resource planning process cannot yet be determined. Further DDO reorganization and significant personnel reductions may make it difficult for the full benefits of such a plan to be realized. Nevertheless, an analysis of the initial records of interview was begun in July, 1977, and is continuing. This analysis will identify areas requiring action, both on a group and on a individual basis.

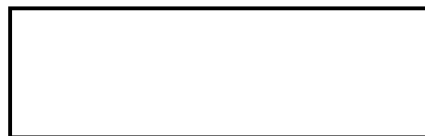
Despite what may happen during FY 1978 and FY 1979, when the Directorate will be reduced in size by over 800 positions, the groundwork has been laid in ISS for a personnel management program which can be adjusted to meet changing needs, without impairing the fundamental philosophy

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which recognizes the importance of good management of human resources. There may be aspects of the program which can be adapted to meet Directorate-wide requirements, particularly since the Directorate is already suffering the consequences of less than ideal personnel management programs and will face further pressures during the reduction period. ISS is an example of a component which faced many of the same problems experienced Directorate-wide and has had some success in solving them.



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